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ABSTRACT

Kids Interactive Telecommunications Project by Satellite (KITES) is a cooperative international telecommunications partnership involving the University of Lowell, Digital's corporate video network, Videostar Connections Inc. (a satellite networking broker), PanAmSat (a satellite operator), and several other public education institutions in Massachusetts. KITES has been used to establish an interactive video link between eighth grade students in Lowell and their peers in Karlsruhe, West Germany, for exchanging views on environmental science issues and sharing cultural information. KITES was launched at the University of Lowell College of Education, and schools were brought into the partnership by the university's Center for Field Services and Studies. Although evaluation results indicate that students, teachers, project staff, and corporate personnel are pleased with the project's results, several problems--the most serious of which centers on the lack of resources for curriculum development and training--remain unresolved. Plans for future KITES videoconferences include instructional television broadcasting through the facilities of Massachusetts Educational Television; the exploration of low-cost "compressed video" technologies for videoconferencing; and future partnerships with foreign agencies, involving non-school educational and cultural agencies such as museums, libraries, and community centers. (GL)

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On June 1, 1989 at 9:00 AM EDT, eighth grade students from the McCarthy, Englesby, and Arts Magnet schools in Chelmsford, Dracut and Lowell Massachusetts participated in a direct 90-minute interactive video link with their peers at the Nebenius Realschule in Karlsruhe, West Germany. Telecasting from Digital's corporate video network in Bedford Massachusetts, these students exchanged views on environmental science issues and shared cultural information. They particularly focused on nuclear power, alternative energy sources, and toxic waste disposal. The participating students and their teachers are members of a project called KITES.

KITES is a cooperative international telecommunications partnership involving the University of Lowell, Digital, Videostar Connections (a satellite networking broker), Inc., PanAmSat (a satellite operator), and several other public education institutions, including:

- o the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunications
- o the public schools of Chelmsford, Dracut and Lowell
- o Massachusetts Educational Television, the state's school ETV service

Supporting the Nebenius Realschule in Europe was the Padagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe, a teacher preparation institution in West Germany.

In addition to the two-way video conference on June 1st, throughout the school year KITES used domestic and international data

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telecommunications links for project planning, curriculum development and direct student-to-student interaction. Supporting the domestic data communication was the University of Lowell-based electronic conferencing system, CoSy, through which Massachusetts teachers may communicate with one another and with expert University faculty. The international data link was arranged through CS.NET, a worldwide academic computer network.

KITES was launched at the University of Lowell College of Education. Through the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunications (MCET), the College approached the Manager of Digital's corporate video network with the idea of international videoconferencing for students. MCET also facilitated the international contact with institutions in the West German State of Baden-Wuerttemberg, a state with formal economic ties to Massachusetts. The idea behind KITES was -- and is -- to use installed corporate telecommunications capacity to help students examine curricular content in a cross-cultural setting. The cross-institutional partnership has been essential to project success.

Responsibility for bringing schools into the partnership fell to the University's Center for Field Services and Studies (CFSS) -- the College of Education's outreach arm to area schools. The CFSS coordinated curriculum development and provided training in the use of the University's Instructional Network, a domestic seven-town interactive television system. To prepare for the international teleconference, regular KITES classes were held on this two-way network.

Although evaluation results show that students, teachers, project staff and corporate personnel were very pleased with the results of KITES, several problems remain unresolved. The most serious one centers on the lack of resources for curriculum development and training. Although the in-kind value of Digital's contribution, combined with personnel time from the University of Lowell and other participating organizations was substantial, there were virtually no funds for project administration, for travel, for teacher release time, for materials or for consultant help. Such support is critical to long-term success.

Plans for future KITES videoconferences include instructional television broadcast through the facilities of Massachusetts Educational Television so that larger populations of students may link in with the on-camera teleconferees via toll-free '800' telephone lines. The project leadership also intends to explore low-cost 'compressed video' technologies for videoconferencing. Future partnerships with foreign agencies will emphasize science and other curriculum-related themes. They will also involve non-school educational and cultural agencies, such as museums, libraries, and community centers.

In the longer term, links will be attempted not only with western European nations, but also with Asian, east bloc and third world countries. Emphasis on the pre-videoconference sharing of information via e-mail, electronic file transfers and artifact exchanges will continue. Greater attention will be given to teacher training and preparation, and to curriculum development. Projects will be driven by curriculum content needs, whether or not science based. Most

importantly, the future development of KITES depends critically on an enhancement of the institutional partnerships already established.

Public and private sponsors of KITES have leveraged benefits far in excess of their contribution's face value. In providing the resources necessary to operate a viable school-based program, sponsors have not only brought middle school personnel toward the cutting edge of international telecommunications, they have done so in the context of important curricular content. They have shown schools that the learning benefits associated with corporate employment apply also to school instruction. If the KITES project develops as envisioned, these benefits will expand beyond the on-camera conferees to include schools across the state.

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